

01/19/2007

- Providing A New Direction for America
- □ □ In the First 100 Hours of the New Congress

Last November, the American people made clear their desire for a new direction for the country. They voted for the restoration of checks and balances, greater integrity in Washington, a Congress that addresses the concerns of working families “ like healthcare and education “ and an economy that works for all Americans, not just the privileged few.

In the first one hundred legislative hours of the 110th Congress, the new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, put together a series of measures that were meant to send a signal that Congress is moving in a new direction and is being run by people with a

different set of priorities – priorities that put the needs of average working people ahead of the economic and political elites.

In the first two days of the Congress, January 4th

and 5th

, we adopted a package of rules reforms that were based in large part on a measure I introduced last year with my colleagues Barney Frank (D-MA), David Price (D-NC), and Tom Allen (D-ME).

The reforms are meant to restore checks and balances to the legislative process and make it harder for special interest lobbyists to put their fingers on the legislative scales. They represent a major

sea change in the way business will be conducted in the Congress.

To prevent more boondoggle golf trips to places like Scotland, the rules restrict lobbyists from organizing, financing or participating in Member travel and prohibit Member travel on corporate jets.

To protect the country from situations like the 15 minute vote on the Medicare Prescription Drug Bill that ended

up lasting three hours “ from 3am to 6am “ before the Republican leadership twisted enough arms to pass the bill, the rules ban the practice of holding votes open to change the outcome.

To ensure the full review of proposals, like the sweetheart deal for the pharmaceutical companies that was slipped into a Defense bill after the Conference Committee had

already agreed on the final measure, the rules ban “dead of night” special interest provisions from sneaking into conference reports without a vote.

And to reform the earmark process, the rules require all Members to certify that they have no financial interest in any requests they make, and

all committees must list all earmarks included in a bill or report language with the identity of the sponsor. The rules also stipulate that earmarks can not be used as a carrot or a stick to influence how Members vote.

With the remainder of the first one hundred hours, the House passed six

measures, with significant bi-partisan support for each, that are intended to show where this Congress' priorities will be.

We passed a measure to increase the federal minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour.

Right now, when adjusted for inflation, the federal minimum wage is at the lowest level it has ever been, and an average CEO makes more before lunch on the first day of the year than a minimum wage worker does working full time all year long, so increasing the minimum wage

simply returns a little
fairness to our economy.

We approved a bill that
would eliminate the
outrageous special
interest deal that prohib
its the federal

government from using its purchasing power to negotiate for lower drug prices and we passed a measure that would expand federal funding for life-saving embryonic stem cell research to improve health care.

The House passed a bill that would begin to cut the interest rate on student loans to help make college more affordable for working families.

We approved a measure that rolls back \$14 billion in subsidies to Big Oil companies and invests those funds instead in clean, renewable energy resources and alternative fuels to

increase our energy
independence.

And the House
adopted my bill,
which responds to
the
recommendations

of the 9/11
Commission by
reforming and
strengthening
Congressional
oversight on
intelligence
operations.

These are modest proposals that are intended to set the stage for what comes next as we struggle to deal with ending the war in

Iraq and try to build a consensus that will allow us to reform our health care system, make college education truly accessible for all, and overhaul trade practices that

threaten the
livelihood and
wellbeing of
American workers.

